

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 PM-07 L-03 NSC-07 CIAE-00

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SPC-03 EB-11 TRSE-00 DRC-01 /117 W

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R 210800Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5282

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0354

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, G, XF

SUBJ: GABONESE-ARAB RELATIONS

KUWAIT PASS DOHA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 236 (NOTAL)

1. GABONESE CONTINUE TO CULTIVATE THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE ARABS. GOG ANNOUNCED OFFICIALLY THAT "IMPORTANT DELEGATION" DEPARTED LIBREVILLE MARCH 20 FOR TEN-DAY VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, QATAR, BAHRAIN AND LEBANON.

2. DELEGATION HEADED BY NEWLY-APPOINTED MINISTER WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS OKUMBA D'OKWATSEGUE, WHO WAS GABON'S CHIEF REPRESENTATIVE AT LAHORE ISLAMIC SUMMIT, AND WHO IS RISING GABONESE POLITICAL STAR DUE CHIEFLY TO HIS LOYAL CONVERSION TO ISLAM FOLLOWING THAT OF PRESIDENT BONGO. OTHER MEMBERS OF DELEGATION INCLUDED MICHEL
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ANTCHOUHEY, COUNSELOR TO THE PRESIDENCY FOR AFRICAN

AFFAIRS; MARCEL SANDOUNGOUT, GABONESE AMBASSADOR TO PARIS; JEAN PIERRE LEMBOUMBA, COMMISSIONER FOR PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT; AND ORMA OULD-BABANA, A MAURITANIAN DESCRIBED IN GOG COMMUNIQUE AS "AN ARAB EXPERT."

3. PURPOSE OF TRIP NOT DISCLOSED OFFICIALLY BUT WE FAIRLY CERTAIN GABON PRIMARILY SEEKING LOANS/GRANTS AND PERHAPS TO LESSER DEGREE CONSULTATIONS WITH ARABS ON OIL POLICY.

4. INCLUSION OF OULD-BABANA IN DELEGATION FURTHER INDICATION OF MAURITANIAN-GABONESE COOPERATION AND MAURITANIAN ROLE IN FACILITATING GABON'S CONTACTS WITH ARABS (REFTEL). OULD-BABANA, WE UNDERSTAND, HAS RAPIDLY BECOME A GRAY EMINENCE SINCE HIS ARRIVAL IN LIBREVILLE A FEW WEEKS AGO, INSTRUCTING PRESIDENT BONGO IN ISLAM AND ARABIC AND ADVISING HIM ON ARAB AFFAIRS.

5. DESPITE (OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF) THIS ACTIVE WOOING OF ARABS BY GOG, BONGO SOUGHT TO REASSURE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN MEETING MARCH 19, DURING WHICH HE DOWN-PLAYED HIS TIES WITH ARABS.

6. BONGO MENTIONED THAT HE FULLY APPROVED OF LIFTING OF OIL EMBARGO AND THAT SYRIA'S OBJECTIONS MEANINGLESS SINCE THEY HAD NO OIL. REGARDING LIBYA BONGO MADE A NUMBER OF CRITICAL COMMENTS ABOUT QADHAFI. HE SAID HE WAS "OBSESSED WITH KORAN," MADE MANY PROMISES WHICH HE DID NOT KEEP, WAS AT ODDS WITH ALL HIS NEIGHBORS AND WAS NOT EVEN COMPLETE MASTER IN HIS OWN HOUSE. WITH OBLIQUE REFERENCE TO LAHORE MEETING BONGO COMMENTED THAT IT WAS RIDICULOUS TO PLACE SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON KORAN.

7. COMMENT: DESPITE THESE COMMENTS WHICH DOUBTLESS REPRESENT BONGO'S GENUINE FEELINGS, IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT HE WILL CONTINUE PUBLICLY TO CULTIVATE HIS TIES WITH THE ARABS--PARTICULARLY THE OIL PRODUCING ONES.
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